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Bush Theatre 9 Oct - 9 Nov
BABY REINDEER
by Richard Gadd
directed by Jon Brittain

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I first encountered the work of comedian Richard Gadd when his show *Monkey See Monkey Do* was broadcast on Comedy Central as part of a series from the Soho Theatre.

This was something new and different, dealing with real-life experience of a sexual assault, documented while running on a treadmill. Gadd was clearly a fearless artist able to dig into the most personal of situations to bring them to an audience.

Now, *Baby Reindeer*. Gadd has again utilised his own experience, to a degree, to shape this theatre performance. He is the only person on stage, supported by recordings, text and characters he conjures up for us to build the story of “Richard Gadd”.

This character, who may or may not be the performer, works in a bar and has some success with comedy gigs. He makes the mistake of befriending “Martha Scott”, a supposed wealthy lawyer in need of a cup of tea.

So soon after seeing *Velvet*, which is a semi-fictional piece about a young man groomed and exploited by an older man, it is inevitable that *Baby Reindeer* raises questions.

In its frank depiction of a 25 year old service provider becoming the victim of a serial stalker in the person of a woman nearly twice his age, who wears ill-fitting clothes in various shades of pink, it feels unnecessarily cruel at times.



Richard Gadd in *Baby Reindeer*

Although I cannot deny the power of Gadd’s performance, or the brutal rawness of his writing, we are only hearing one side of the story. To develop such a

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It is clear that “Martha” is being failed by the legal and care systems just as much as Gadd, and it does seem that there is some culpability on the part of the young man who initially felt flattered at the attention of an older, wealthier woman. To be fair, Gadd has himself addressed these issues in interviews.

It is also uppermost in my mind whether this show is good for the performer, or the audience, at this time. He’s supported by recordings (of his support network and of his stalker), by screens full of rolling texts and emails, by bouts of semi-darkness and in one scene, a chance to step from the spotlight to retrieve a prop. And yet he’s in sharp focus with something so deeply personal.

Gadd recounts a terrifying and disturbing situation that blighted his life for years, over and over again. He leaves himself open when discussing his personal relationship with Teri, a transwoman, and the effect “Martha” had on that relationship.

He discusses, again, with brutal honesty, that sexual assault which clearly still leaves emotional scars. His association with Martha seems perverse on both sides, which leaves us, the audience, conflicted.

It is entirely possible that we are meant to spend part of *Baby Reindeer* feeling that character being described in front of us is less of a victim than he claims, and that is certainly brave and deeply intelligent writing.



Richard Gadd in *Baby Reindeer*

Baby Reindeer is a rich addition to the debate around harassment and stalking, and the issues around the funding of mental healthcare.

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Gadd’s recollection of the police almost being amused at his fear of a woman smaller than him who emails him hundreds of times a day with banalities and compliments, without making direct threats, feels an accurate depiction of what is tolerated legally before any action can be taken against an abuser.

It does leave me thinking, however, where Gadd can go from here, and whether there are any other catastrophic events in his life he has yet to share with his audience.

Baby Reindeer continues at the Bush Theatre until 9 November.

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